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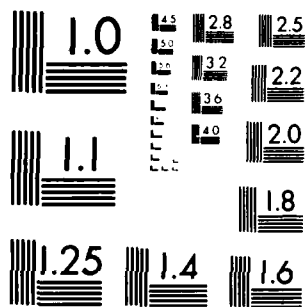
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DRES SUFFIELD REPORT

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METHODS OF LIBRARY SURVIVAL:

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John G. Currie

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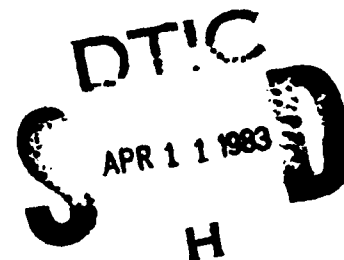# METHODS OF LIBRARY SURVIVAL:

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The current situation of journal subscriptions in a Research and Development
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and staff-actioned maintenance duties are noted. A journal resource sharing network of
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INTRODUCTION TO THE PUBLISHED PAPER

This paper was originally presented to a working group of Information Scientists which is made up of the individuals who control the information services of the Department of National Defence's six Defence Research Establishments (DREs) and the central control agency (DSIS) all of whom are responsible to the Chief of Research and Development. We are, by the broadest interpretation, a network although we do not function as one. We share the following attributes:

1)   a certain similarity of research;

2)   a similar overall purpose;

3)   the same management policies;

4)   certain communications systems; and

5)   we are all ultimately responsible, through our Chiefs, to the same office, Chief of Research and Development.

The Defence Research Establishment Suffield (DRES) suffers from an unfortunate physical location. The nearest university is approximately 250 km away. We are not on any regular delivery routes from organizations such as the National Research Council. We are virtual prisoners of the mail service. The delivery problems are severe and at the present time there is no forseeable respite.

While this paper was written for a very specific audience, I do feel that it is valid for all information services. Journal costs are excessive. There has been an information explosion. There is literature scatter. The most unpleasant realization is that, if left unchecked, journal holdings can begin to function as a library's version of "Pac-Man" eating the budget, staff time and eventually the effectiveness of the research assistance one can provide.

During the past three years DRES Information Services have spent a considerable amount of time pondering the popular questions of inflation (Harvey and Murray), methodology and progress (Currie and Murray). Money has been a serious library world concern from time immemorial and I doubt that this will ever change. The reaction at DRES when the periodical costs increased from $31,000 in 1977 to $73,000 in 1982 was to throw money at the library. This did, of course, have some pleasant effects but it did not solve the problem. Abuses to the system were created and a "buy now, pay never" attitude became deeply ingrained in the users collective consciousness. While the Chief of DRES is still willing to channel great sums of money the library's way it has now reached the point where the library staff cannot cope with the amount of material coming in, nor do I feel that the users find a high portion of relevant material, let alone read everything that they have asked for on automatic circulation. "The culture which has liberated man from the primitive forest" as Daniel Gore pleasantly put it "now thrusts him into the midst of a forest of books no less confining and stifling" (Gore, p. 1376). The majority of information consumers seem incapable of accepting Gore's forest as a truism and unless I am out in intellectual left field it seems that their chance of finding something pertinent, let alone the most pertinent information, decreases as they slowly sink into the increasing mire of rapidly accumulating printed matter.

This is not to say that the information consumers and providors at DRES are in constant conflict. While the consumers may not wish to accept the concept of the fecund nature of journal publishing and while they cling to their idealized vision of the seemingly omniscient university libraries of the late 60s they do realize that money, like nostalgia, isn't what it used to be. The average cost of periodicals at DRES doubled between 1977 and 1982 settling in at $204 per title before such items as service charges and foreign exchange were added. However, after a great deal of lobbying by the information staff and much soul-searching, shuffling of feet, and some feelings of martyrdom by the consumers, the DRES journal list was cut from 358 titles in 1982 to 254 titles for 1983. Interestingly enough, the average price per title rose from $204 to $236 which would have doubled this year's inflation figure. This is not to say that the consumers did not make sacrifices for they did bid a tearful farewell to some core journals and to all of the reviews.

The DRES exercise in restraint was very beneficial but it was not an end in itself. Consumers at DRES, including those just out of university, seem firmly wed to the printed page. Some of the consumers use DRES's two on-line retrieval systems, CAN/OLE and DIALOG, for reference purposes but there is still a strong resistance to replacing browsing by SDI or computer searches. It is interesting to note that the

strongest opposition comes from the systems and the computer types. While the consumers seem aware of the number of journals in existence, anywhere from 10,000 to 24,000 (Subremanyam, p. 34), and the reality of literature scatter they are not yet ready to face the problems.

The consumers did not agree to let 30% of their journals disappear because of literature scatter and low retrieval, or on-line retrieval, or the fact that the information staff spent a ridiculous amount of time just handling journal transactions. They made the cuts because there was no money. However, to make the cuts less painful and to keep the consumers goodwill I had to promise very good interlibrary loan service and what I envisioned is a network encompassing the six DREs, DSIS, NDHQ and all its branches and the three military colleges.

Interlibrary loans appear to be like Mark Twain's weather, we all think about them without doing anything about them. A search on my DIALOG helpmate LISA in September 1982 showed only 54 hits for Librar?(w)Loan? or Resource(w)Shar? for the years 1980 – 82. Some days I wonder if the world has passed me by without me knowing it, but a review of an unscientific sampling of the articles leads me to believe that no one solved the ILLO problems while I wasn't looking. This being the case, I would like to present the following truisms and a proposition for more efficient and effective information provision.

1. DRES cannot purchase all the journals that the consumers want.
2. Blanket interlibrary loans through CISTI will cost DRES several thousands of dollars in 1983.
3. The nearest university library to DRES is 250 km away so a network with them is not feasible.
4. Approximately 30% of the journals at DRES are also held by other DREs or NDHQ libraries.
5. The DRE and NDHQ libraries are already joined by a common telecommunications net (FAXCOM).

Therefore, it seems eminently reasonable and sensible to form an interlibrary loan network between the DREs and NDHQ. If we add the three military colleges we will increase our chances of encompassing the desired material in the net.

The first step involved would be the exchange of periodical lists between the participating establishments. From this it would be a small step to exchanging table of

contents pages of select journals which will help to combat the duplication of expensive and limited interest journals. For example, both DRES and DREO (in 1981 at least) subscribed to *Biochemical Journal (Cellular and Molecular)*. The estimated 1983 price will be $1004.72. We would send copies of the tables of contents to DREO while DCIEM would send us the contents from *Life Science Part 1* ($772.14) who would receive......and so on. Policy could then be decided as to the scope of co-operation, the medium of transfer and the price.

There are problems, to be sure, but they are not insurmountable, that is why networks draw up policies. As Nitecki points out there will be a shift in your work flow to meet the changes in service. She also states there will be those users and those staff members who feel that they should have the material always at hand in case it might be needed (Nitecki, p. 11). There is also the need for unified and comprehensive delivery service (Russell, p. 22). A library will not necessarily have a complete holding or the journal may be out on circulation.

Perhaps I am overly optimistic but I view these problems as minor and perhaps more problems of attitude than of implementation. Of course, there will be shift in work load, but it will be expected and I doubt if the time spent in increased ILLOs will match the man hours spent wrestling with this year's periodical budget (9 man-days for the librarian at DRES and inestimable man-days for the consumers who helped) plus the sheer handling time that was spent on the 358 titles, marking them in, circulating them, claiming lost issues, replacing them on shelves, even just opening the mail. Consumers can be assured that the item will be available. We already have a FAXCOM telecommunications net and optical character scanners are not unfeasible, so the journal will not be out of circulation for more than the length of time it takes to be photocopied. The common service of circulating a journal to a set list of readers is no longer satisfactory anyway. This is a much debated question at DRES. Automatic circulation means that in many cases a journal disappears into some "black hole" the moment it starts off on its long, and sometimes precarious, journey. As for the plight of not having complete holdings, I find it hard to believe that most libraries have complete sets these days. Our journal delivery has been so erratic that some days our list of journal holdings resembles the roll of the 17th Lancers the day after Balaclava.

The major problem I foresee is one of consumer reaction. There is a great controversy over the definition of a "peripheral" journal, rather like beauty being in the eye of the beholder. There are benefits and illusionary benefits to the retention of masses of journals. One real benefit is that ideas may be retained from the scanning of articles

which are not immediately relevant. This benefit loses some of its power from the fact that scanning masses of literature is not practical today and research at DRES these days appears to be applied research to meet specific tasks. *Ergo* scanning is not work effective. Illusionary benefits are that one can note trends in research and follow the developments of ones' peers. This can be accomplished on-line or by SDI.

Problems of attitude can only be overcome by performing in a manner which will convince people that your theory is better. As I am not a fan of behavioural psychology and do not particularly want to subject my consumers to electric shock treatment the only way I see to change attitudes is to provide a better service. The benefits of a system such as this would be:

1. A more efficient use of consumer's time with a much better recall in their reading.

2. A better relevance ratio as the consumers will depend more on well planned on-line searches and SDI profiles. The information staff will have much more time to aid and guide the user as they will be able to transfer the effort of handling masses of journals to responding to the needs of the consumer.

3. Money can be spent more effectively for such items as computer time, terminals, or SDI profiles.

4. A journal on circulation may spend literally months making its way to a reader. SDI and current awareness will notify the consumer of relevant items and loans can be requested. If the policy agreed upon suggests FAXCOM or Optical Character Scanners as delivery systems then a transaction could conceivably be completed within three days.

5. DRES would be willing to provide these FAXCOM requests at no charge within the network.

I believe that such a network is sensible, feasible and full of promise. The next step is to test it. Policies must be decided upon: who is willing to participate, who will own the journals, who holds what journals, what will the method of document transmission be, will there be a charge. Complete agreement is needed on the above. Perhaps the best method of testing would be to try such a network on a limited scale monitoring the results very carefully for, say, a year and then reviewing the entire subject and amending policies if need be.

A network of this type does not seem like an unobtainable goal. There will be complaints, to be sure, from some consumers and from some information staff who will feel that they are losing autonomy. The benefits of such a network seem to be obvious. The goal of an information service should be to provide information as efficiently and effectively as possible. It is a utilitarian service now, not a personal service. The necessity to confront the four horsemen of the Library Apocalypse, time, money, manpower and attitude, is becoming acute. A periodical resource sharing network should help in the confrontation.

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This Sheet Security Classification

DOCUMENT CONTROL DATA - R & D

(Security classification of title, body of abstract and indexing annotation must be entered when the overall document is classified)

1 ORIGINATING ACTIVITY	2a. DOCUMENT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION
Defence Research Establishment Suffield	z Unclassified
	2b GROUP

I DOCUMENT TITLE

Methods of Library Survival : The Journal Resource Sharing Network   (U)

4 DESCRIPTIVE NOTES (Type of report and inclusive dates)

Suffield Report   359

5. AUTHOR(S) (Last name, first name, middle initial)

Currie   John   G.

6 DOCUMENT DATE	7a. TOTAL NO. OF PAGES	7b. NO. OF REFS
Feb 1983		6

8a. PROJECT OR GRANT NO.	9a. ORIGINATOR'S DOCUMENT NUMBER(S)
64D00	SR 359
8b CONTRACT NO.	9b. OTHER DOCUMENT NO.(S) (Any other numbers that may be assigned this document)

10 DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT

UNLIMITED

11 SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES	12. SPONSORING ACTIVITY

13. ABSTRACT

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DSIS
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KEY WORDS

Information Science

Information Retrieval

Journals

Periodicals

Library Policy

Defence Research Establishment Suffield

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